

Rare Animals of Louisiana



Sooty Tern

Onychoprion fuscatus

Rarity Rank: S1B/G5

	1	2	3	4	5
State					
Global					
	imperiled		rare		secure



Photo by Dan Lane

Identification:

- Medium sized tern, 36 to 45 cm long with a wingspread of 82 to 94 cm
- Sexually monomorphic
- Adults in breeding with completely black back, white belly, forked tail with white edges, white brow, sharp pointed bill, with black feet and legs
- Adults in non-breeding have plumage similar but blackish feathers of crown and nape with white margin
- Immature birds are dark brown with white flecks along back and wings

Taxonomic comments:

Some consider the Sooty Tern to be a superspecies with *Onychoprion anaethetus*, the Bridled Tern

Habitat:

- Stays out at sea unless nesting
- Nests on remote islands and beaches with scattered or no vegetation

Food habits:

- Small fish as well as squid and insects
- Individuals in flock generally remain 1 to 20 meters above water when hunting for food, descending simultaneously when food is spotted
- When prey descend, flock rises up again
- Unlike diving birds, must catch prey within a few centimeters of surface

Range:

Tropical islands and coasts along the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans

Reproduction:

- Individuals begin to breed at about 6 to 8 years of age
- Nest is a simple depression in the sand, sometimes surrounded by sea plants
- A single white egg with brown spots is laid between April and June (more variable in other locations) and is tended by both parents throughout a month of incubation



Range based on occurrences in Natural Heritage database

Rare Animals of Louisiana



- Young fledge about 1 to 2 months after hatching

Threats:

- Predation by cats
- Egg collection by other seabirds and humans
- Coastal land loss

Beneficial Management Practices:

- Create beach habitat with dredge materials
- Create nesting areas

LA River Basins:

Pontchartrain, Mississippi, Barataria

References:

Cooper, L., and T. Goodier. 2002. How long do birds live? San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory.
<http://www.sfbbo.org/longevity.htm> (20 Jan. 2003).

Lowery, G. H. Jr. 1974. Louisiana Birds. 3rd Ed. Kingsport Press, Tennessee.

NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. 2002. Version 1.6 . Arlington, Virginia, USA: NatureServe. Available: <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>. (Accessed: December 6, 2002).

Peterson, R.T., and V.M. Peterson. 1980. A field guide to the birds: A completely new guide to all the birds of Eastern and Central North America 4th Ed. Houghton Mifflin Company, New York.

Screiber, E. A., C. J. Feare, B. A. Harrington, B. G. Murray, Jr., W. B. Robertson, Jr., M. J. Robertsons, and G. E. Woolfenden. 2002. Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*). In The Birds of North America, No. 665 (A. Poole and F. Gills, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

Wiedenfeld, D.A., and M.M. Swan. 2000. Louisiana breeding bird atlas. Louisiana Sea grant College Program, Louisiana.